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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000596

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STATE FOR AF/W
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: HEAD OF NORTHERN ELDERS SPEAKS ON 3RD TERM

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Former presidential aspirant and father of the Kwara State Governor, Sola Saraki, told the Consul General (CG) President Obasanjo is determined to remain in power by any means. Saraki emphasized that the 2007 election will go to one of Nigeria's more established figures--the next generation of politicians will have to wait for the next election. He said the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is ill-prepared to hold an election, violence would ensue if proper elections are not held, and the military could step in. He lamented the country's failure to discuss social and economic issues other than the constitutional amendment and Niger Delta development. End summary.

12. (C) The dean of Kwara State politics and an important Nigerian power-broker, Saraki told Consul General (CG) in April that President Obasanjo is determined to remain in power even if the proposed constitutional amendment does not pass through the National Assembly. Saraki emphasized the President would find "other" means to stay beyond 2007. Obasanjo has illegally siphoned large sums of money from the Nigerian bursary and he wants to stay in power to protect his "checkered" past, Saraki claimed.

13. (C) When asked about potential opponents to Obasanjo, Saraki reeled off the usual suspects: Vice President Atiku, Ibrahim Babangida, and Muhammadu Buhari. Saraki, however, discounted Atiku's chances because Atiku played too closely for too long with Obasanjo. Despite Atiku's very acrimonious public break with Obasanjo, many Northern leaders would not forgive him for sacrificing overall Northern interests to Atiku's prior tactics of backing Obasanjo in hopes he would be selected as heir apparent. Moreover, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) continued to tightly monitor Atiku's financial activities, threatening his ability to campaign effectively. As for Buhari, he has strong grass roots support in the north, but has virtually no support in the south, Saraki opined. That leaves Babangida as the candidate with the greatest chance to defeat Obasanjo, Saraki estimated.

14. (C) More fundamental than identifying potential candidates, stressed Saraki, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) must be prepared to hold an election. Saraki said INEC was ill-prepared, poorly funded and already behind schedule.

15. (C) Saraki said if proper elections were not held, violence would occur and the military could intervene to restore order. In order to prevent such a scenario, Saraki stated there needed to be the "right" mixture of winners and

losers to allow for greater representation. He said if opposition parties like the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) are not adequately represented, violence would likely ensue in the areas where these parties have a strong ethnic support base. However, Saraki claimed Obasanjo would rather see the Army come back to power if he couldn't extend his tenure.

¶6. (C) Saraki lamented the lack of debate on social and economic issues. "This man has so divided the country" that no one is talking about anything else except the constitutional amendment, Saraki moaned. As far as the Niger Delta, he said Nigeria could benefit from international assistance in managing and auditing funds earmarked for developmental projects at the national level. He declared he was not opposed to a greater amount of oil revenue allocated to the Niger Delta States, provided safeguards were placed on spending to prevent pilferage. At the state level, the amount has to be allocated for certain social and economic projects aimed at improving living standards, employment, and education. He emphasized that it is to everyone's advantage to have the Delta peaceful and prosperous.

¶7. (C) Comment: Saraki is ardently anti-Obasanjo but publicly has to hedge to protect his son, the current governor of Kwara State. Nevertheless, Saraki is working behind the scenes to mobilize Northerners and their elder politicians to thwart Obasanjo. For an old war horse who has harbored his own presidential ambitions, in the back of Saraki's mind lies the belief that if Obasanjo is out of the running, anything is possible, including Saraki's emergence as a dark horse. While a remote possibility, it is one that Saraki's ambition cannot help but entertain. In the end and given his age, 2007 might be his last active stab in electoral politics. Thus he will work to see Obasanjo leave,

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position himself as well as he can, and try to situate his son for the future, should his national ambition again be foiled. End Comment
BROWNE